TechMatters: "Prezi"-tations: an Alternative to PowerPoint

Krista Graham, Central Michigan University

As instruction librarians, giving presentations is our stock in trade. For many of us, Microsoft PowerPoint is the tool that we turn to in our attempt to add interest and engage our audience in the information we are sharing. However, despite a variety of features designed to allow presenters to add visually engaging elements and transitions, the fact remains that PowerPoint slideshows are by their very nature fairly static and linear.

Prezi, launched in 2009, was developed in response to the perceived limitations of other presentation tools. Rather than using a series of slides, Prezi is built upon a single-canvas model. All of the presentation material is placed together on a single blank space. You can then zoom in, out, and around the canvas to focus on specific ideas or to show the broader connections between them. You can use scale to visually demonstrate relationships between ideas, as well as to create visual interest.

Because Prezi is such a visual tool, it is difficult to adequately describe it using the written word alone. Before we investigate some of its features in more detail, I encourage you to visit the "Explore" section of the Prezi web site (http://prezi.com/explore/). Here you will find samples of some truly creative uses of Prezi in different subject areas. You can also search the vast collection of publically available prezis (i.e., Prezi-based presentations) to find one on the topic of your choice. Try "library instruction" or "Boolean operators" or "dewey decimal". Go ahead. I'll be here when you get back!

Getting Started

Prezi is a cloud-based system, meaning that there is no software to download and install on your local machine. Unless you opt for a "Pro" license all of your work will be done and saved online.

To get started, select the type and level of license you want from the "Sign Up" page, and then register to create an account. Prezi offers five different license options: Public (free), Enjoy ($59/year), Pro ($159/year), Edu Enjoy (free), and Edu Pro ($59/year). The basic Public license provides 100Mb of storage space, and allows users to create prezis online, as well as download (but not edit) completed prezis for offline presentations. However, 99%+ of LOEX Quarterly readers, as "active students and teachers", should qualify for the even better (and also free) "Edu Enjoy" license. This increases storage space to 500mb and also gives you the ability to determine with whom you share your prezis, and the ability to brand your presentation with your institutional logo. In order to qual-

ify for an educational account you simply must have an email address that clearly belongs to an educational institute (e.g. myname@myschool.edu).

Creating Your First Prezi

After creating you new account, you will be taken to the "Your prezis" page. Here you will find a link to create a "New prezi". This link takes you to a "Create a new Prezi" dialog box where you assign a title and optional description. Next, you will be given the chance to select one of six templates to use as a jumping off point, including the blank default option. Then, press the "Start editing" button to be dropped into the Prezi editor (see Figure 1) and view a brief "Welcome to Prezi!" orientation prezi to help you get started.
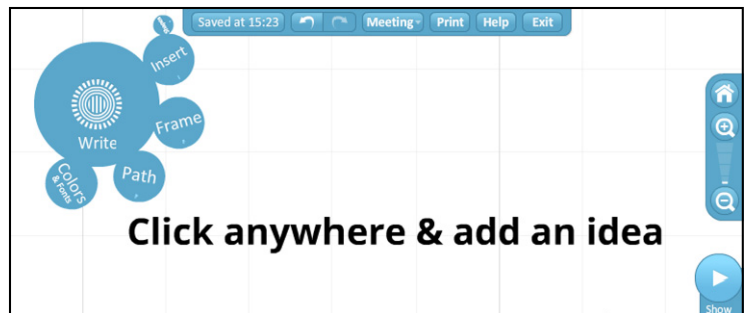

Figure 1: Prezi editor, starting with a "blank" canvas template

Because Prezi is conceptually and functionally different than other presentation tools you may have used, I definitely recommend this orientation tutorial. In fact, I would recommend a trip to the "Learn" tab (http://prezi.com/learn/) before you begin to experiment on your own. Here you will find three short YouTube videos on Prezi's various features and also "Cheat Sheets" for each of these areas that summarize the most important tips to keep in mind.

What Makes Prezi Different?

Prezi was created specifically to address the perceived shortcomings with other presentation tools, such as PowerPoint. As a result, it has a variety of features and navigational elements that you won't find elsewhere. A brief overview is useful in seeking to understand how Prezi represents an evolution in presentation software.

Single Canvas

As previously mentioned, presentations are created on a single presentation canvas. This means that all content is placed together in one location allowing the presenter to demonstrate relationships between ideas in a

more global manner than can be accomplished in a series of slides. A key goal is perspective: giving your audience a sense, visually, of **all** the information. In many ways, developing content for a prezi is similar to gathering ideas on a whiteboard or in a collection of Post-it notes, where you can jot down ideas, and then move them around relative to one another making notations about interconnections between ideas as you go. This means it can be useful for presentations where showing relationships are important (e.g., an overview of library resources) and also other activities, like mind mapping. But beware: visual clutter is a danger, as too much "stuff" on the screen at any one time will prevent you from giving people a clear picture of how elements are related.

Zebra to Move, Scale, and Rotate Elements

Fundamental to the single canvas model, is the ability to demonstrate relationships between ideas by moving them, adjusting their scale, and rotating their position relative to one another. To do so, Prezi uses a tool called a "zebra" (see Figure 2).
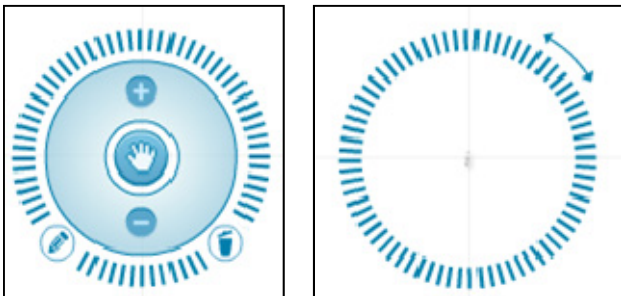

Figure 2: The Prezi "zebra" allows you to scale, move, and rotate page elements

Click on any element you have placed on the canvas and the zebra will appear. Use the "hand" icon to reposition an element, the "+" and "-" icons to increase or decrease size, the "pencil" icon to access text editing options, and the "trash can" to delete an element. Click on the outer striped ring (see Figure 2, right) to initiate the rotation interface on the zebra.

Bubble Menu

In the upper left-hand corner of the menu you will find what Prezi calls the "Bubble Menu", presumably so named due to its shape (see Figure 3).

The "Insert" menu allows you to embed non-text elements such as images, YouTube videos, pre-developed drawings and chart templates, files from your computer, and/or basic shapes. All of these can be edited using the zebra after insertion.

"Frames" are used to group elements together. Elements in a frame are all considered to be on the same level, which means that when you start navigating
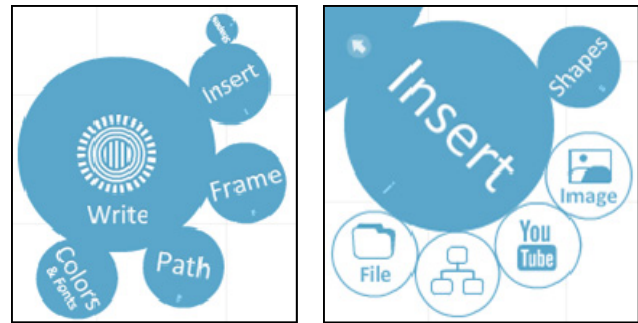

Figure 3: Use the "Bubble Menu" to insert, group, and format objects on the canvas

through your presentation extreme zooming will not occur as you move from element to element within a given frame. Of course, you can embed smaller frames within larger frames, and in such cases the presentation will still zoom in on the sub-content when selected.

"Colors & Fonts" contains a pre-developed set of color palates that you can apply to your presentations globally. You can also edit colors and fonts on individual elements using the "pencil" icon on the zebra.

Paths to Create Zooming Storyline

Prezi gives you the ability to break free of solely presenting information in linear boxes (i.e., slides) and instead think spatially and in layers - how does your information relate to and build upon itself? Using the "Path" menu, you can set a designated order in which you want to move through the elements on your canvas during a presentation. During a live presentation, you can proceed through the assigned path using the forward and back arrows in the presentation window. As you go, Prezi will automatically pan around and zoom in on the elements that you have selected. At any point in time, however, you can deviate from the path by selecting and navigating to a specific element on which you want to focus. Be careful not to overdo this – while your presentation should be dynamic, it should be smooth so that the audience can follow along, not get dizzy like they are on a corkscrew rollercoaster.

Repurpose, Share, and Collaborate

*Reusing Content to Create Prezis*

If you want to experiment with Prezi, but don't want to spend a lot of time building one from scratch there are two simple ways to get started. First, you can import slides from a previously created PowerPoint or Keynote presentation. To do so, just save your slideshow as a PDF file, and then from the Prezi bubble menu select "Insert", "File", and then select the file you want to import. Once imported, you can "prezify" away.

The Proof Is in the Print

While printing occurs in the last stage in the process, it is actually one of the first things you should consider before you begin the production process. If you are having your project printed elsewhere, be sure you find out in advance what are the specifications to submit a print-ready design. Ask what is the preferred file format (e.g., TIF, PDF, PSD,), resolution (e.g., 300 ppi), color mode (e.g., CMYK), and if there is anything else you should know beforehand.

If you are a DIY kind of gal or guy and decide to print from a color desktop printer in your office, shoot off a test image, or *proof*, to see how the project looks. Remember, colors can change in appearance as you move between color spaces and transfer images between different devices such as scanners, monitors, and/or printers. Expect some variation.

Now that you have a better understanding of color schemes and RGB codes, the meaning of key adjustment settings and the challenges of working in color modes, you too can navigate this technical terrain! The best way to learn and keep learning, of course, is to create, to experiment, to traverse the vibrant, digital landscape, and "explore uncharted territories" of color in print design.
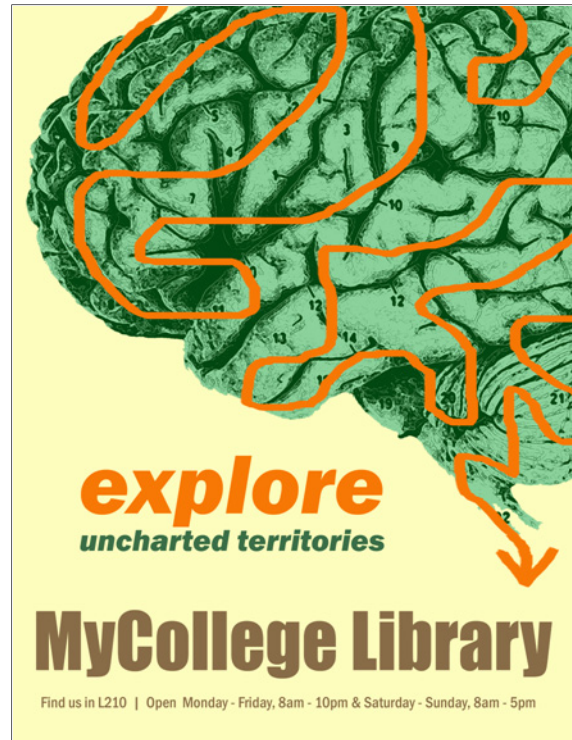
*(Kuler was recommended to me by fellow librarian Kristen Mastel from University of Minnesota Libraries).

Alternately, you could start off using one of the many prezis that have been designated as "reusable" by their creators. Go to the "Explore" tab, search for prezis on a topic of interest, and then check the "Show only reusable" content check box. Select a prezi you want to copy and then from the presentation screen click the "Make a copy" button. A copy of the prezi will be added to the "Your prezis" tab and from there you can access and edit it.

Sharing Prezis

Prezi provides a variety of options for sharing your content with others. First, you can make your prezi "Public" so that others can find it by searching in the "Explore" tab. You can also select the "Public & allow copy" option if you want to make your prezi reusable by others.

Whether public or private, you can send a direct link to selected individuals to view your prezi. To do so, simply select the "Edit together" button from the button menu on the presentation viewer page and fill in the e-mail address to allow the recipient to view your prezi

online. An account is not required for others to view your prezi.

Prezi Meeting

A second option on the "Edit together" window allows you to send an e-mail with a link inviting collaborators to join you in a "Prezi Meeting". When in this mode, teams can work together in real time (or not) to edit and update a prezi. In order to co-edit, however, all users will need to have a Prezi account.

Conclusion

If you are looking for a flexible tool that may help you spiff up your presentations and possibly engage your audience in a new way, I would recommend that you give Prezi a try. Do keep in mind that working with Prezi requires you to conceptualize your presentation materials in a different way than you may be used to if you typically work with PowerPoint. As a result, it may take some exploration and practice to learn how to use Prezi effectively. However, if you approach it with an open mind and a willingness to engage in a bit of creative experimentation, you'll be developing interesting and engaging presentation materials with Prezi in no time at all!